



108: El's Scrapbook by cali-chan

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Summary: "We wanted to give you a place where you could store all your pictures from when we were kids." It's El's birthday, and Mike has a special surprise for her. PG, romance/fluff/friendship, post-S3 (SPOILERS!), Mike/Eleven.

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"We wanted to give you a place where you could store all your pictures from when we were kids." It's El's birthday, and Mike has a special surprise for her.

Note: Happy Mileven Week 2019, guys! This is for theme #6: art. Hope you like it, and hope to see you sharing your own fanstuff for the Mileven Week prompts! You can still post your works (fanfic/fanart/gifsets/edits/etc) even if the prompt has already passed. Be sure to participate, there can always be more Mike/Eleven love out there. =)

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"...And then, after his bike had skidded all the way across the street, he stands up, pats the grass stains off his pants, and goes 'I totally did that on purpose!'" Mike said on the other end of the line with a chuckle. El, meanwhile, was laughing so hard, her eyes were starting to tear up. "I mean, you know how Lucas is: can't admit anything he does is wrong— not straight away, anyway."

"Except with Max," El pointed out, still breathless from laughing so much.

Mike snorted. "Yeah, 'cause he likes making out with her," he retorted in what Will liked to call a *duh* tone. El could just imagine him rolling his eyes. "But she wasn't around back then, and none of *us* was going to kiss him, so..."

El had to chuckle, too, at the super awkward mental picture that conjured up. The mirth only lasted for a moment, though, before another thought occurred to her. "Neither was I," she said, meaning she wasn't around when they were growing up in Hawkins. Not that

she had any interest in kissing Lucas.

"Is that why you keep asking me to tell you all these stories from when we were kids?" Mike asked, and it was only then that El realized that was true; she *had* asked him to tell her stories from his childhood in their last couple of calls. She hadn't even really noticed she was doing that, but she had. That caught her by surprise.

"I guess," she mumbled with a sigh. Letting herself fall back on her bed, she added, "I wish I could have grown up with you." She loved hearing about all the antics Mike and the boys had gotten up to when they were younger, but it did make her a little sad that her own childhood was... so different from theirs, to say the least.

"I know," Mike agreed, sobering up to match her own tone. "Me too, but... you know, maybe it's not so bad that you didn't." There was a pause for a second and then he hurried to add, "*Not* that it was a good thing that you grew up in that lab, of course— if I could change that, I totally would, you know that, it's just— I just mean— I just..." He trailed off, and she heard him take a deep breath as if taking a moment to rearrange his ideas.

Just that small gesture already had her smiling. She thought it was adorable when Mike babbled like that. Which he did a lot. Most of the time she had a hard time following the point he was attempting to get to, but just because it got confusing didn't mean it wasn't super cute. "What I mean is," he started again, apparently having managed to pull his thoughts together, "that maybe it's good that you didn't know me back then. Maybe you wouldn't have liked me if you knew how big of a dork I was."

She shook her head. "You're still a dork," she said, with a smile. Not for nothing was it Max's favorite name to call the boys— affectionately, of course. El adjusted the phone against her ear. "I like your dork... ness?" She finished the sentence almost like a question, unsure if she was using the right word. Derivative nouns were hard.

"Dorkiness," he corrected her, but in a gentle manner. El smiled. She liked that Mike never made her feel stupid when she got something wrong.

"Dorkiness," she repeated, committing the word to memory.

"That's it," Mike said, and she could almost hear his smile in that one word. "And, anyway, you *have* to say that. You're my girlfriend. But hey, at least now you can hang out with us whenever you're in town for a visit, right?"

El nodded, and then, remembering he couldn't see her, replied out loud. "Yes. And when you come to visit me next month," she added, excited at the prospect. "Did your mom say yes? About my birthday?" El's birthday was coming up in June, and they had been planning for a while on Mike coming over from Hawkins to spend a few days at the Byers' so they could celebrate her birthday together. He was off school for the summer, so it shouldn't be too complicated, he'd said, but El was still nervous that he wouldn't be able to make it.

"Oh yeah, she totally said it was fine!" Mike replied enthusiastically on the other end of the line, and El breathed a sigh of relief. "I mean, Nancy's gonna come with because she and Jonathan have to do some college stuff or whatever, but since she's driving up there anyway, I can just tag along with her. We can probably stay for, like, a week or something, if that's okay with Mrs. Byers. Still trying to work out the details."

"Cool," El said, smiling contentedly to herself. It would be awesome to have Mike around for a full week if they could manage that.

She was about to launch into all the things she wanted to do while he was visiting when she heard a knock on her door. She shifted her gaze to find Will standing at her doorway. "Hey. Dinner's ready," he said with a small smile.

"Be right there," she let him know, and then spoke into the phone again, "I have to go." Before she could listen for Mike's reply, she remembered something, and covering the phone's mouthpiece with one hand, she turned to Will again. "Do you want to speak to Mike?"

"Sure," said Will with an unconcerned shrug. "Can you go help Mom set the table, though?"

El nodded. She didn't mind handing the line over to Will. She knew

she talked to Mike a *lot*— nearly every day— and Will only got to do so once or twice a week, so if she could give Will and Mike more of a chance to chat, she was good with that. She didn't want him to feel excluded or anything, and she knew Mike didn't want that, either. "I have to go help with dinner, but Will will stay on the line," she said into the phone. "Talk to you tomorrow?"

"Yeah, sure," Mike replied immediately. "Love you."

"Love you, too," she responded in kind before handing the phone over to Will, who had walked over from the door to standing just beside the bed, watching their goodbyes with an amused smile. Once the phone was off her hands she got up off the bed, and if Will had intended to make any teasing comments, he refrained, jumping straight into an animated conversation with his best friend. Sometimes he and Jonathan teased her about her relationship with Mike, but just lightly. Jonathan always said that's just something siblings did, and it was all in good fun. El liked the idea of having siblings.

And even if she didn't, it wouldn't have bothered her. Knowing she'd be seeing Mike again soon made her really happy, so she walked out of her room with a pep in her step.

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The month flew by in the blink of an eye, and soon enough, El's birthday was coming up and Nancy and Mike had arrived at the Byers'. They'd gotten there two days before El's birthday, and would stay until three days after.

Things were a little tight around the house with two extra guests. Mike had to sleep on the couch, which was a little small for him given how much he'd grown in the last year; El felt a little bit guilty about that, but there wasn't much she could do about it, as the only other option was for him to sleep on a sleeping bag in Will's room, and that would be even more uncomfortable. At least Nancy was

bunking with Jonathan— they were both eighteen, Joyce had said, so she couldn't really stop them from sharing a bed, though she certainly expected them to behave in an appropriate manner. By which El figured she meant no sex, though she didn't ask. Her knowledge of that topic was still sketchy at best, though she knew enough now to be able to tell when adults were trying to avoid bringing it up explicitly.

Still, despite the slight discomfort, El could not be more ecstatic to have her boyfriend near her for the first time in months. Over the past couple of days she and Will had shown Mike around town and taken him to all their favorite spots. During the week, they had every day mostly to themselves, since Nancy and Jonathan were usually out running errands. Because there was no school, they could stay up late every night playing videogames (so long as they didn't make *too* much noise; Joyce did have to get up early for work, after all).

On the morning of El's birthday, they played a campaign that Mike had been planning for the last couple of weeks. El was still getting the hang of D&D, but she loved this campaign because 1) Mike had written it entirely for her, and 2) she got to play a badass witch princess who slew a dragon with her powerful magic and lived happily ever after with her gallant knight. Once they were done with the campaign, they all pitched in to help Joyce make a big lunch-but-maybe-more-like-early-dinner feast to celebrate El's birthday— or at least as much of a feast as the Byers could afford, which El appreciated, regardless.

Once the family celebration was done, Mike and El planned to head to the movie theater. *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* was opening just that day; El had seen the preview on TV and she thought it looked really fun, so she was super excited to see it. One of the few good things about leaving Hawkins was that she could be out in public without worrying that someone from the lab would find her, and since the move, going to the movies had become one of her favorite things in the world. It was like watching TV, but *better*.

They'd invited Will to come with them as well, but he said he'd see it later with a couple of friends from school, so she and Mike should go by themselves and make it into something of a date night. That sounded perfect to her, so after she helped Joyce clear the table, she

headed to her room to get some shoes on so they could leave. It was still early for the showing they were aiming to see, but they were walking to the theater so they could get a little more time alone, so they had to leave a little bit earlier than they normally would, and... El couldn't find the shoes she'd planned on wearing. She'd spent so much time making sure to pick her cutest shoes for this outing. Where had she put them?

As she was turning her closet upside down looking for the elusive pair of sandals, she heard someone knock on her open door. She looked over her shoulder to find Mike standing in her doorway. "Hey," she greeted him with a smile. "I'm almost ready. Just trying to find my shoes."

"Sure. Um, before we leave," he started, taking one step further into the room, "uh, there's something I wanted to give you."

It was only then that she noticed that he seemed to be hiding something behind his back. That was unexpected, and she straightened up, giving him a curious stare. "You already gave me my present," she pointed out, a hand going to the necklace currently fastened around her neck, which she was sure he'd spent a lot of time saving up his allowance for. The pendant hanging off the thin gold chain was a teddy bear with a small pink gemstone embedded in its tummy. Mike had insisted it wasn't *that* expensive and she shouldn't worry about the cost, but even if it had been the cheapest pendant ever made, she would've loved it. She *did* love it, so so much.

"Yeah, but this is more from, like, the whole party," Mike clarified, walking closer to her. Once he was close enough, he pulled his hands from behind his back and handed her something that looked like... a book.

She took it from his grasp and examined it, realizing it wasn't really a book, but more like an album. It had a pretty cover of zigzagging lines on a white background, and it was decorated with bright, colorful stickers all over. A teal ribbon ran across it, leading to a pink circle right in the middle, where "El's Scrapbook" was spelled in mismatched letter stickers.

"We wanted to give you a place where you could store all your

pictures from when we were kids," Mike told her with a smile.

She looked at him, confused. "Pictures... from...?" she started to ask, not understanding what he meant, but he didn't offer an explanation; instead, he just gestured for her to open the scrapbook and browse through it. Curious, she sat down on the edge of her bed and flipped it open to the first page.

The caption caught her eye first. "El's first photograph," it said. When she looked at the image nestled within a bright blue frame directly above those words, she found it to be a color drawing— not quite like Will's style of art that she'd come to be so familiar with, but a more cartoony and expressive, cutesy but also detailed at the same time. And the subject of the drawing was unmistakable: it was Hopper, holding a small bundle wrapped in a blanket in his arms. You couldn't see who it was wrapped inside the blanket, but one or two curly strands of hair popped up from within the fabric, giving a clue as to the child's identity. Hopper was wearing his HPD uniform, albeit a little sweaty and wrinkly, and his hat sat askew on top of his head, but there was no doubting the happiness in his expression as he smiled down at the baby in his arms.

She couldn't help it: her eyes started to water. "Hey, no..." Mike immediately reached out to her, as if to comfort her. "I didn't mean to make you sad. I'm sorry. I can take it back if you don't like it—"

"No!" El exclaimed, pulling the open scrapbook against her chest protectively, as if Mike was about to wrestle it right out of her arms. Obviously, she knew he wasn't going to do that, but it was still her instinctive reaction. When he didn't make any further moves, she looked at him sheepishly and somewhat apologetically. "I do like it. It's just— I just miss him..." Mike nodded at her, understanding. "How... how did you do this?" she asked, quickly wiping the tears off her cheeks with the back of one hand. She didn't want to mess up the scrapbook by getting it wet.

Grinning, Mike sat down on the bed next to her. "You know Will's friend from art class?" El nodded. She'd never met the boy in question, but Will talked about him all the time. "Well, we all pitched in to commission the pictures from him. Dustin and Lucas looked for photos of everyone so he would know what we looked like when we

were younger, and then I sent them to Will, who gave them to his friend to use as references. We all came up with the ideas for the pictures together, and then Max put together the scrapbook."

El couldn't believe all the effort they'd put into this, just for her. "...Everyone?" she asked, curious.

"Yeah!" he confirmed, obviously excited to see her reaction to it. "Go on, keep looking!"

Not holding back a grin of her own, she pulled the scrapbook down to her lap again and started eagerly passing the pages. She was greeted with a whole host of "photos" of herself with her friends—over a dozen of them, distributed evenly on loudly decorated pages—seemingly at various ages and doing various activities.

There was one of her and Will, maybe four years old, lying on their stomachs on the ground, him drawing something on a piece of paper and her working on a coloring book. Another one of two toddlers, curly sandy and bright-orange hair marking them as El and Max, respectively; they were cuddled up next to each other for a nap, hands held together between them, and Max had her free thumb stuck in her mouth.

Another picture was just her and Dustin, looking a little bit older—maybe seven or eight— with El's hair now darker and equally as curly as Dustin's, except hers was pulled up into twin pigtails. They were grinning widely at the "camera," showing off the fact that they were both missing their two front teeth. In a bigger picture that took up most of the next page, a slightly older Lucas, maybe about ten or so, was putting a party hat on a grinning El; off to the side, Dustin was sneaking icing off a somewhat-lopsided two-tiered birthday cake while Max glared and waved a fist at him threateningly.

Scattered images of El at different ages, wearing different Halloween costumes: A fairy with small, rounded, transparent wings; Minnie Mouse in a bright-red polka-dotted dress and a headband with mouse ears and a bow; an astronaut, complete with a helmet that was way too big for her frame so she had to carry it under her arm rather than wear it; Raggedy Ann, outfit exact down to the striped stockings; and even one where she was dressed as Princess Leia, complete with

space buns and a blaster. One picture had a five- or six-year-old Max pulling El's hair up into a ponytail while Mike and Lucas peeked in through an open door that had a sign that said "NO BOIZ ALLOWED" taped on it. Another full-page picture showed the entire party, maybe closer to their ages now, from the back as they cheered on Dustin at the arcade.

There was even a Polaroid-like snap of El with Joyce where both of them were making funny faces at the camera, Joyce sticking her tongue out while El sucked her cheeks in so she looked like a fish. One of little Lucas teaching little El how to ride a bike, Will running up to them in the background, seemingly distressed as El looked like she was about to fall off. El and Hopper sitting on a couch wrapped in blankets as they watched TV, the scene looking every bit as real as her memory of the last Friday night they watched *Miami Vice* back at the cabin the previous year.

The last page of the scrapbook contained two pictures, framed in stickers of hearts and flowers, that appeared to happen in sequence: In the one on the left, toddler Mike shyly handing toddler El an Eggo waffle. In the one on the right, El, waffle in hand, leaning forward to give him a kiss on his chubby, freckly cheek. It was the most adorable thing she'd ever seen, and she wanted to look at it every day for the rest of her life.

She'd been grinning so widely as she looked at the "photos" that she didn't even realize she'd been crying through the whole thing, as well. Mike didn't freak out again, though; he seemed to understand that in this case, crying was a good thing. Instead, he just sat there and watched her as she flipped through the pages, understanding that this was an emotional moment for her. Once she reached the end, though, he piped up, "Do you like it?"

"I love it," El said with a sniffle. She couldn't believe the level of detail they'd managed to include in these pictures— Mike had even remembered that she'd once mentioned her hair was blond back when she was younger. She chuckled, overwhelmed with happiness. "It's perfect."

He nudged her shoulder with his, smiling down at her warmly. "You have memories with us now."

She nodded, unable to stop a joyous little laugh from bubbling out of her. "I was Minnie Mouse for Halloween!"

"Yeah, and you looked really cute, too," Mike said, laughing right alongside her. He was beaming down at her and she was sure she had to be blushing, but she wasn't even self-conscious about it because she was just so... happy. So, so happy. She had the best friends. She had the best boyfriend. She loved them so much, and she felt their love for her in each and every page of that scrapbook. She felt so loved, she thought she might burst.

Mike took one of her hands in his, fingers entwined, and looked for a moment like there was something important he wanted to say. Just as he opened his mouth, though, Joyce came knocking. "Guys, are you still trying to make it to the 5:30 showing? Because you should be leaving..." She trailed off when she noticed the tear tracks on El's cheeks. "El? What's wrong, honey?" she asked, immediately worried.

"Nothing," El said. She once again wiped the tears off her cheeks and attempted to give her guardian what she hoped was a reassuring smile. "Just looking at some pictures from when I was little," she added, a quick giggle punctuating her elation at the end of the sentence. Mike laughed, as well.

As expected, Joyce was super confused by this response. "Pictures from...?" she started with a frown, looking completely flabbergasted. "El, sweetheart..."

Before she could articulate her concern, however, Will rather literally barreled into her. "So?" he asked eagerly over his mother's shoulder. "Did she like it?"

Smiling at his enthusiasm, El quickly stood up, laying the scrapbook carefully down on the bed beside Mike, and made her way to the doorway so she could throw her arms around Will. "I love it!" she let him know, squeezing him tightly to convey her appreciation. "Thank you so much."

"I knew you would!" he said in response, hugging her back just as tightly. "I'm so glad." He pulled back and looked at her wide-eyed, like an idea had just occurred to him. "Oh hey, you guys don't have to

leave for your movie just yet, right? We should call the others in Hawkins! They said they'd be at Dustin's waiting to hear from you—that way they can wish you a happy birthday together."

He turned to Joyce, almost bouncing on the balls of his feet, he was so enthused by this idea. "Mom, come on, help me get the long-distance thing right," he said. Joyce, for her part, still looked rather baffled by everything that was happening, but let herself be pulled toward the living room by her suddenly-super-energetic younger son. El watched them go with a smile.

When she turned back to look at Mike, she saw that he'd stood up as well, leaving the scrapbook carefully laid down in the middle of her bed. He looked at her and smiled, and she went to him, wrapping her arms around his torso and squeezing him just as tight as she'd squeezed Will. He seemed a little surprised by the suddenness of the gesture for a second, but just as quickly threw his arms around her shoulders, resting his cheek against her hair. "What's this for?"

"Thank you," she said in a small voice, rubbing the tip of her nose against the collar of his polo shirt. She was trying not to get emotional again— she didn't want to go to the movies looking like a complete wreck— but she was just so... grateful. To have all these people in her life who cared so much that they would do something like this for her. She never thought she would have that. It still felt like a dream some days.

"Well, it wasn't just me," Mike said, pulling back just slightly so he could look at her face. "The others helped, too. It really was a group effort."

"But it was your idea, right?" she retorted, because of course it was. He'd been the one who'd noticed how sad and lonely she felt when she thought back to her childhood and the abuse she'd been through. He was the one who'd been trying to make her feel better about it, just little by little, phone conversation by phone conversation, through the months. The others might've helped, and she was infinitely grateful for them, too, but that scrapbook might as well have come with a "From: Mike" tag attached to it, she was so certain of it. It was just instinctive in him to try and make the people he cared about feel better in any way he could. Especially her.

He didn't have any response to that assertion— he couldn't. So instead he just sort of shrugged awkwardly like he did sometimes, and it made her chuckle. He was so cute, she just had to get up on her tiptoes and kiss him. "I love you," she said when they pulled back.

"I love you, too," he replied in kind, leaning his forehead against hers and smiling serenely. "Happy birthday." El closed her eyes, just taking in the moment. She was so glad he was here with her, even if it was just for a few days. She'd missed him so much.

They stayed like that for a minute or two, until Will yelled animatedly from the living room, letting them know that their friends were on the line. Letting him know that they'd be right there, Mike headed toward where Will was handing him the phone, while El snuck away to the bathroom for a second, just to check herself in the bathroom mirror really quickly. She was probably going to have to reapply her makeup before they left, she figured, but that was okay; if they missed their showing, they could always just get into the next one.

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Notes: I'm just a day late shut up that's totally fine

This fic was (very obviously) inspired by two things: First, the story *Haikei* by Ciircee, which is my favorite *Card Captor Sakura* fanfic of all time. Ciircee will probably never read this, but I just want to say for the record that her story is a masterpiece (as is the sequel), and even after such a long time since I first read it, I go back to it at least once a year.

The second piece that inspired this story is actually a work of fanart titled "Stranger Kids" by verauko. It's a drawing of the S1 party as babies, and it's totally the most adorable thing you will ever see. Be sure to look it up on DeviantArt if you can't click on the link (FFN is ridiculous about links in stories, sorry). I am not a very visual-artsy person (I couldn't draw a stick figure to save my life), so I am always in absolute awe of people who can draw so incredibly, and verauko is

one of my favorites. Go check out her stuff!

Eleven's birthday is in June here because the first *Stranger Things* official novel, *Suspicious Minds* by Gwenda Bond, reveals that Eleven was born in June. I don't particularly consider the novels hard canon, but June is more convenient than February, which is the month I was using before for her birthday, so I decided to go with it this time. I do find it hilarious, though, that if the June 1970 birth date is made hard canon on the show, it would mean El is probably older than most, if not all, the other party members. xD I settled on June 11th for her because, well, *duh*— but also because that was the day *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* premiered in 1986.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off is a John Hughes film starring Matthew Broderick which, really, anyone who considers themselves a child of/fan of the 80s should have watched. *Miami Vice* is a 1984 crime drama starring Don Johnson and Sonny Crockett, which ran for five seasons on NBC; Hopper mentions in the last episode of *Stranger Things* 3 that he and El liked watching it together on Fridays. Raggedy Ann is a character created by Johnny Gruelle in a series of illustrated books for children that he started publishing in 1918; she was a rag doll with bright-red yarn hair who appeared in a number of different media adaptations including TV shows and movies alongside her brother, Raggedy Andy. Princess Leia is, of course, one of the main characters in the *Star Wars* franchise, and Minnie Mouse is— well, you probably know who she is, and which company created her; I'm just mentioning her here to make sure our evil overlords at Disney don't take offense with me daring to utter her name in a nonprofit venture such as this completely harmless story. Don't sue me, please.

I just want El to be happy, okay? I keep making her cry in my stories, but at least this time around she was crying from happiness so it's a whole different vibe. Oh, and if you're thinking that "Will's friend from Art class" is someone Will is crushing on, you'd be right. ;) See you when I see you, and have a lovely Mileven Week, guys!